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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8951

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2107

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 7697

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5976

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0177

RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 7293

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002905

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

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TAGS: PREL PGOV TH

SUBJECT: THAILAND: FIREWORKS AT FIRST YELLOW-SHIRT RALLY IN ALMOST A YEAR

REF: A. BANGKOK 02887 (THAKSIN LECTURES IN CAMBODIA)

1B. BANGKOK 02902 (REDS AND YELLOWS SET TO CONGREGATE)

1C. 08 BANGKOK 3154 (PEACEFUL PROTEST IN BANGKOK)

1D. BANGKOK 813 (RED RALLIES CONTINUE)

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Classified By: POL Counselor George Kent, REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (U) SUMMARY: The People's Alliance for Democracy's (PAD) first yellow-shirt rally in almost a year attracted approximately 20,000 well-behaved supporters in Bangkok late November 15 to the old PAD themes of defending the monarchy against fugitive former PM Thaksin and denouncing the actions of neighboring Cambodian leader Hun Sen, who very publicly hosted Thaksin for a November 10-14 visit. Like many of its late 2008 rallies, this PAD gathering was marred by an explosion by an still undetermined device which injured 12 people, including two children; police are still investigating the explosion, which took place during PAD founder and New Politics Party (NPP) leader Sondhi Limthongkul's speech.

12. (C) COMMENT: The PAD's message was focused and pointed: Thaksin and his association with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen represented a threat to the monarchy, and Thais needed to counter that threat. The explosion and injuries which marred the rally were an unfortunate reminder of the chaos of late 2008, when such attacks were routine. A chief suspect in the eyes of many observers is notorious red-shirt "King Taksin Warriors" militia head MGEN Khittaya Sawasdiphol, who bragged openly in 2008 about a string of explosive attacks on the PAD's Government House encampment and reportedly told the PAD to bring their own coffins to the November 15 rally. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

YELLOW-GREENS RETURN TO THE STREETS...

13. (U) On November 15, approximately 20,000 people attended the PAD rally at Sanam Luang to voice their displeasure with fugitive former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's recent visit to Cambodia (REF A). While the actual crowd size fell far short of the PAD organizers' estimates of 30-50,000, the rally itself was significant, as it represented the first time in almost a year that the yellow-shirts had publicly assembled. In the interim, the PAD leaders had devoted their

energies into establishing a political party, the New Politics Party, to promote their ideas within the formal parliamentary system (REF B).

¶4. (U) Core PAD leader and head of the NPP Sondhi delivered the keynote address at the rally, arguing that the PAD was the only group that protected the monarchy. Sondhi further claimed in his speech that a European ambassador recently told him that Thailand should get rid of Thaksin and colonize Cambodia. He also called for the next mass gathering at Sanam Luang on December 5, King Bhumibol's birthday (note: there is a long-standing tradition of mass, candle-lit evening gatherings to honor the King's birthday. End note). Other speakers, including Chamlong Srimuang, the second most prominent PAD leader, and Senator Khamnoon Sithhisaman, accused Thaksin of attempting to follow the "Hun Sen model" and set up a communist-styled government with a pliable monarchy, and breaking 700 years of historical precedent by seeking Cambodian support to gain power in Thailand.

...AND SO DO EXPLOSIONS

¶5. (C) At about 8:50 p.m., eighteen minutes into Sondhi's twenty-two minute speech, there was an explosion at the rear of the stage. Sondhi almost immediately attributed the incident to troublemakers trying to discredit the PAD. The explosion injured 12 people, including two young boys attending the rally. Embassy contacts within the metropolitan police and the Internal Security Operations Center (ISOC) could not immediately confirm the type of explosion used in the incident, nor the mode of delivery. ISOC spokesman Colonel Thanathip Sawangsaeng personally believed that it might have been an M-79 grenade, as had been

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reported in Thai-language press, and that it could have been fired somewhere close to the Ministry of Interior building nearby. Police arrested one person in relation to the incident; he was subsequently released.

¶6. (C) The nature of the explosion pointed to the possible involvement of Royal Thai Army MGEN Khittiya Sawasdiphol, aka Sae Daeng, an avowed red-shirt supporter currently occupying an inactive "adviser" position and seen warmly greeting Thaksin and Hun Sen at a November 13 red-shirt gathering in Siem Reap. Sunai Phasuk, a researcher for Human Rights Watch and a regular Embassy contact, told us that in the run-up to the PAD rally, Sae Daeng had made comments warning PAD supporters to bring coffins to Sanam Luang. Sae Daeng, who has remained under the radar since the April riots, is suspected of orchestrating a series of explosive-based fatal attacks against the yellow-shirts during the prolonged PAD occupation of Government House in 2008 and again threatened violence against the PAD in April 2009 (REFS C, D). While charges were never filed in connection to the 2008 attacks on PAD rallies, M-79 grenades were the explosive most often cited by the media as being involved.

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